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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

South Africa has joined a global initiative for Family Medicine advocacy

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The international #1WordforFamilyMedicine initiative serves to explore the identity of family physicians and allows the international Family Medicine community to collaborate on advocating the discipline. South African family physicians provided 42 responses via a social media and online survey. Two “word cloud” images were created based on two icons recognised as being truly South African around the world – the national flag and former president Nelson Mandela. The #1WorldforFamilyMedicine initiative was promoted by the World Organization of Family Doctors across the globe to help celebrate World Family Doctor Day on 19 May 2015. To date, over 70 images have been created in 50 different countries on six continents. The images represent family physicians’ love for their profession and the community they serve. It is hoped that this initiative will help to inspire current and future Family Medicine and primary care providers.

To the Editor

Introduction

What does it mean to be a family physician? Family Medicine, also referred to as General Practice in other parts of the world, is often difficult to define within the specialty and in the broader medical community. In South Africa, a national position paper on Family Medicine and expert generalists was published by the South African Academy of Family Physicians towards the end of 2014, in an attempt to clarify the current thinking around family physicians in the South African health system.¹ The image of our specialty is important for the confidence of current and future family physicians. The intent of the South African #1Wordfor-FamilyMedicine initiative is to serve as a novel way of exploring the identity of family physicians and to collaborate with the international Family Medicine community.

Method

South African family physician trainees and family physicians were asked the question: "What is your favourite part of Family Medicine?" via the social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter.²



Figure 1: The first selected #1WordforFamilyMedicine South Africa image, based on the national flag

Additionally, an online survey was created (Checkbox® version 6.6) where respondents could post their responses to this question, their suggestion for an image, as well as participate in a lucky draw. The responses were collected and turned into a “word cloud” image using [Tagul.com](#).

Results

Over a period of 10 weeks, 42 responses in at least seven national languages from across South Africa were collected into a single list. After a discussion of the different image options, two were se-



Figure 2: The second selected #1WordforFamilyMedicine South Africa image, based on former president Nelson Mandela

lected because they are recognised as being truly South African within our borders and around the world – that of our national flag (Figure 1) and the beloved late Nelson Mandela (Figure 2). The design and colours of the flag are a synopsis of principal elements of the country's rich history. Former president Nelson Mandela will be remembered internationally by the values for which he stood, namely "fairness and justice, service to South Africa and its citizens, dignity, non-racialism and the overarching theme of freedom".³

Conclusion

The #1WordforFamilyMedicine initiative has demonstrated the spirit of collaboration across South Africa, linking well with the international movement. Specifically, the #1WorldforFamilyMedicine initiative was promoted by the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) and multiple countries across the globe to help celebrate this year's World Family Doctor Day on 19 May 2015. To date, over 70 images have been created in 50 different countries on six continents.⁴ These images were viewed more than 4 000 times from across more than 80 countries. This initiative highlights the importance of Family Medicine at national, community and individual level in South Africa. The old adage claims that a picture is worth a 1 000 words. In this instance, we argue that they are worth even more as these images represent family physicians' love for their profession and the union between Family Medicine and the community it serves. Furthermore, it is hoped that this

initiative will help to inspire current and future Family Medicine and primary care providers.

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